

# BURNING OF WINTON



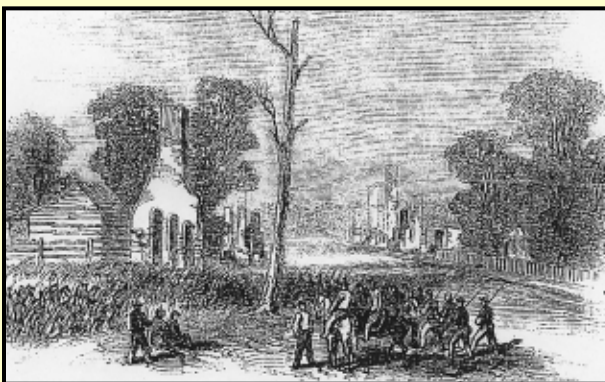
*“Fire ... accompanied the sword”*



## COASTAL EXPEDITIONS

After Union Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside captured Roanoke Island in February 1862, he decided to “sweep Albemarle Sound clean of [Confederate] defenses,” establish inland bases of operation, and encourage eastern North Carolina Unionists. Winton, the Hertford County seat, was located near two railroad bridges and, as Burnside was informed, packed with Union sympathizers. On February 18, he issued a proclamation stating

that “the Northern people were Christians and would inflict no injury unless forced to do so.” The same day, Commander Stephen C. Rowan’s eight-gunboat flotilla steamed up the Chowan River toward Winton, carrying part of the 4th Rhode Island Infantry and the 9th New York



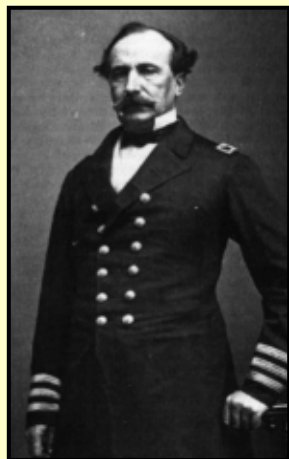
*“Ruins of Winton” from Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper.*

Infantry under Col. Rush C. Hawkins.

As they approached, Confederate Lt. Col. William T. Williams concealed his 400 infantrymen atop a high bluff overlooking the river, with Capt. J.N. Nichols’s four-gun battery in support. Williams planned to lure the flotilla to the dock, then blast it with artillery and small-arms fire. Hawkins, however, saw the glint of muskets from the rigging of USS *Delaware* and shouted warnings to the pilot. As the Confederates opened fire, *Delaware* swept by the dock just ten feet away

and escaped. That night, Winton’s townspeople feted Williams and his men as heroes.

The next morning, the gunboats returned and bombarded Winton. Williams, his soldiers, and the residents fled. Hawkins, enraged by Williams’s ambush tactic, led his men into Winton to loot and set the town ablaze with barrels of tar, burning the courthouse with the county records. Only the Methodist church and two buildings belonging to Union sympathizers remained standing. Hawkins claimed that Confederates had used the buildings “as storehouses and quarters” and boasted that the burning of Winton was “the first instance during the war ... where fire has accompanied the sword.” Winton was rebuilt after the war.



**Commander Stephen C. Rowan**



**Col. Rush C. Hawkins**